

other canal would shortly be built. The plans never went beyond the discussion stage, but during the early days of the canal, the managers were ever hopeful that the State would build a branch canal up the Delaware River from the mouth of the Lackawaxen to bring to the D. & H. the freight of western New York. Benjamin Wright had gone over the ground and reported that "this proposed canal will open a week earlier and close a week later than the Erie Canal. Its route will be shorter and the cost of transportation consequently cheaper."

The signed contracts called for the completion of the entire Lackawaxen section by July, 1828, and the work was pushed to the limit. The records are not specific as to the maximum number of men employed on the Lackawaxen section, but one account states that over six hundred men were at work all winter (1827-1828). The number of wild Irish engaged during the spring and summer of 1828 undoubtedly exceeded that figure by a wide margin and large barracks for housing these men were built near Paupack Eddy (Hawley), and here they soon became the terror of countryside. They were beyond control of the local authorities. They fought with the other laborers and among themselves, but their main enemies were the raftsmen and lumbermen, upon whose domain they were encroaching.

Man for man these two factions were an even match and the dislike was mutual. The raftsmen in particular, had, or at least thought they had, a real grievance against the canal and all those connected with it, for the dam being built across the Delaware below the mouth of the Lackawaxen and the feeder dams on the Lackawaxen itself would interfere seriously with the navigation of their rafts, and then further water drawn from the river to fill the canal would, they contended, so reduce the river level as to make rafting impossible. The canal itself, they thought, would put an end to, or at least seriously injure, their calling. This would have been a severe blow to many people, for during the late 1820's, on the average of seven million feet of lumber were rafted down the Lackawaxen each year. With this in mind we can now easily understand the alarm with which the raftsmen viewed the advance of the canal.

Unfortunately, there are no detailed accounts of these encounters, but Ebenezer Scheerer, of Paupack Eddy, a famous Lackawaxen raftsmen, claimed to have "cracked a good many Irish skulls" during these early years.

Construction of the canal through the wide flat valley of the Never-sink River and upper Rondout Creek was an easy matter compared to the undertaking along the shores of the Delaware and Lackawaxen where the mountains drop abruptly to the river's edge and numerous cliffs rise abruptly out of the river. The blasting was continuous, and in those days, before the invention of dynamite, it was a slow laborious process. It took hours, even days to drill, by hand, one hole which today could be finished in half an hour or less. The steel or iron rods, which were then in use for drilling, were far

below present-day standards of hardness and required frequent sharpening. When the blasting hole was finally ready it was partly filled with black gun powder, an uncertain fuse, made of twisted paper, which had been saturated with saltpeter and dried, was inserted and the rest of the hole plugged with not-too-moist clay. When all was ready the "blower" lit the fuse and ran to safety, hoping that, if the fuse did not sputter out, it would fire the powder within a reasonable time. Many were the lives which were lost when a charge hung fire only to explode when the "blower" returned to relight it.

At the foot of Hawk's Nest Cliff, where the mountain walls rise a sheer three hundred feet out of the Delaware River the canal wall, hugging the base of the cliff, was built up forty feet directly from the river bed. Another problem presented itself at the Narrows of the Lackawaxen, where the raftsmen, years before, had blasted away the sixteen foot falls. Here the canal also was built along a sheer rock wall and the embankment was built upon a cribbing of heavy timbers to a height of thirty feet above the river, which here boils through a narrow gorge no more than forty feet wide.

A mile above the Narrows at the mouth of the Tinkwig Brook the river made a sharp "L" turn. To have followed the river would have made it much too difficult for navigation of the boats. A new channel was dug for the river and the canal embankment built across the mouth of the inlet thus formed. The basin or lake created by this hazardous undertaking which was fed by Tinkwig Brook was known up and down the canal as the "Poolpit" and the rumor that this basin had "no bottom" was widely believed. It is a fact, however, that the bed of this old channel was from ten to sixteen feet below the bed of the new channel, and there the trouble lay, for, as the canal was nearing completion

in 1828, this embankment gave way for a considerable distance, causing a flash flood and leaving the river obstructed.

This was the opportunity for which the hostile raftsmen were waiting and they lost no time in presenting to the legislature of Pennsylvania their claims that the Canal Company had violated their charter, that the canal embankment were inadequate and that the Delaware dam was improperly constructed so as to make rafting unnecessarily dangerous.

That there were influential interests friendly to the canal is evident from the accompanying reproduction of the rough draft of the resolutions proposed to be published in the local papers of Waynes & Pike Counties to refute the allegations of the rafting interests.

It could not but be conceded that "some individual losses had been sustained" because of this break and as a result the Canal Company was obliged to settle the claims of various raftsmen.

The break also caused considerable delay in the opening date of the canal, for the embankment had to be rebuilt in a more substantial manner. However, the following article appeared in the Albany "Argus" on October 20, 1828.

"The canal is complete and will be ready for navigation on the whole line in the course of the ensuing week, and the railroad, from the termination of the canal to the coal mines, is in a state of forwardness and will be finished during the present seasons."

The "Argus" reporter was somewhat behind with his news, for it appears that the packet boat "Orange" had left Rondout on October 16th with many notables on board for Honesdale. The "Orange" appears to have been the first boat to navigate the entire canal, and upon its arrival at the new settlement, named in honor of the first president of the Canal Company, the passengers were accorded an elaborate welcome by the local citizens under the leadership of Wayne County's most outstanding citizen, Jason Torrey.